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SUBJECT: US PRESIDENT BUSH'S POPULARITY RATING; WAR IN LEBANON; IRAN
NUCLEAR THREAT; UN ROLE; THE US ECONOMY; CUBA; US-URUGUAYAN FTA;
US-ASEAN FTA; AIRPORT SECURITY; 08/28/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's major international stories include US President George W. Bush's popularity rating; the status of the war in Lebanon; the nuclear threat posed by Iran; the role the UN should play in international conflicts; the US policy on Cuba; the US-Uruguayan FTA; the US-Asean FTA; and international airports security treated as a foreign policy issue.

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Bush's popularity on the rise thanks to his security policy"

Leonardo Mindez, columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (08/26) "For the first time this year, recent opinion surveys have pleased the White House. After months of slumping support, US President George W. Bush again has popularity ratings of over 40 per cent..."

"According to two opinion surveys, one performed by the CNN network and another from USA Today-Gallup, US President Bush's approval rate is 42 per cent..."

"... The new point is that Americans seem to have separated the Iraqi 'swamp' from the global war on terrorism. In this way, CNN reveals that when asked what party can better lead the strategy in Iraq, American citizens gave Democrats a six-point lead (47 vs. 41%), but when they are asked who would better lead the war on terrorism, Republicans obtain a 10-point lead (47 vs. 38%)."

- "The EU will send 7,000 troops to Lebanon"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" reports (08/26) "After two weeks of intense negotiations and pressures from the international community, the EU finally agreed to be the 'backbone' of UN peace-keeping troops in Lebanon, and it committed to contributing at least 7,000 troops, largely from Italy, France and Spain.

"European representatives put aside their reticence and committed to strengthening the truce between Israel and Hezbollah.

"UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said 'It is a great achievement. Now we can start creating a reliable force to help the Lebanese army control the South of the country, which is one of Hezbollah's main strongholds."

- "War intermezzo"

Centrist "Perfil" newspaper carries an opinion piece by Jorge Castro, political analyst, who writes (08/27) "The war in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, from July 12 thru August 14, can only

be understood in regional and global terms.

"It is a war based on a continuum, which comes from the 1947/48 conflict, continues in that of 1980/82, and will continue virtually after the pause started on August 14, which is a simple intermezzo in political and strategic terms in a long-standing conflict.

"... The war between Israel and Hezbollah is an asymmetric conflict of high technology. All other wars that Israel waged with its Arab neighbors were waged between countries. By definition, asymmetrical wars are long, lack a clear result and a sliding victory.

"No asymmetrical conflict can end in a short war. This end is only possible in conventional wars, in which troops of warring countries face each other, as happened in that of the Six Days (1967) or that of Yom Kippur (1973). Hezbollah seems to have noticed the true nature of the conflict. Israel will have to adapt itself to it."

- "Iran takes one more step in its nuclear program"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" reports (08/27) "Only five days away from the deadline of the UN ultimatum to Tehran to put an end to the sensitive activities of its controversial nuclear program, the Islamic Iranian regime redoubled its bet and challenged the international community by launching a heavy water plant and successfully testing a 250-km land-to-ocean missile.

"In spite of criticism of Western powers' pressure, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad inaugurated yesterday the nuclear plant and asserted he will 'strongly' defend his 'nuclear right.'

"... While heavy water is civilian technology, it will serve to launch a nuclear reactor, which Iran is planning to inaugurate in 2009 and which the international community considers a risk."

- "Washington seeks another way to impose sanctions (on Iran)"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" reports (08/27)d "Vis-`-vis the possibility that the UN Security Council does not manage to impose sanctions on Iran due to its controversial nuclear program, the US is reportedly assessing whether to create an independent coalition aimed at imposing sanctions on Iran.

"According to yesterday's 'Los Angeles Times,' the White House is holding talks with the purpose of creating an alliance of several countries that would freeze Iranian assets and restrict commercial ties with the country.

"... Russia and China have already expressed their intentions of blocking any attempt to impose sanctions on Iran.

"... Reportedly, Washington wants Japanese and European banks to set a limit on their business with Iran."

- "Ahmadinejad's show"

Left-of-center "Pagina 12's" international analyst Santiago O'Donnell writes (08/27) "... Ahmadinejad is driving George W. Bush nuts. Before the war in Lebanon, the US President had obtained, with great effort, a UN resolution compelling Tehran to stop its nuclear program by August 31 under the threat of sanctions.

"... According to The New York Times, the US is planning to resume the plan of old-style unilateral sanctions, pressure on financial institutions doing business with Iran, etc. However, according to experts, the thing is not that easy. The only sanction that would immediately damage the Iranian economy would be a boycott on oil imports and investment in the energy because Iran does not have enough oil refineries... Nonetheless, with respect to this approach, Tehran could sit on its oil barrels, thereby making world oil prices skyrocket, which could trigger an international financial crisis.

"Bush wanted something much easier. He wanted UN inspectors to close the nuclear plant in Natanz... But Iran, along with its ally Hezbollah, has just won the war, and it is not planning to leave its incipient nuclear program aside."

- "The UN should not be wrong again"

Leading "Clarín" carries an op-ed page by Agustín M. Romero, professor, Master in International Relations, University of Buenos Aires, who writes (08/26) "The UN is attempting to organize a force to implement Resolution 1701, which seeks a cease fire based on the end of Hezbollah's attacks and Israel's military operations in Lebanon. Nothing leads us to believe that this mission will have a better outcome than those deployed in Lebanon, Rwanda, Somalia and Sierra Leona.

"In order to avoid a new failure, the UN should not make the same mistakes and it will have to adapt itself to a new international scenario.

"The national security paradigm has changed... and now dilemmas come from within the States...

"In this framework, the UN should draft a long-term strategy beyond currently established governments.

"Secondly, before intervening in a confrontation, the UN should bear in mind what its objectives are to establish clear mandates. Neither of these two things has been accomplished in Resolution 1701.

"... Once the UN has a clear strategy and objectives, it should provide its troops with financing, equipment and infrastructure to accomplish those purposes."

- "The US: clouds over an indebted economy"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarín," opines (08/26) "There is a large group of stubborn US critics, among whom we find prestigious economists, who are delighted to see that there are signs that could support their eternal speculation about an inevitable and imminent decline of the US giant and its power.

"... As never before, and for many understandable reasons, this criticism of the US decline gained new impetus when George W. Bush took over six years ago.

"Bush brought with him irresponsible fiscal policies. These policies only benefited the wealthiest sector of society, favored the downward spiral of the trade balance, discouraged the protection of natural resources and, as though all this was little, jeopardized

world security (invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq).

"Even further, there were crises under the Bush administration such as that of 'the new economy', which bet on the revolution of communication, just like the scandalous bankruptcies of global conglomerates like Enron."

- "'US policy on Cuba is basically a philosophy of punishment'"

Paula Lugones, international analyst of leading "Clarín," interviews Soraya Castro Marino, a prestigious Cuban academician (08/27) "While Fidel Castro has temporarily left the Cuban government, Soraya Castro Marino does not envision changes in the US-Cuban relationship in the short term. A researcher at the Center of Studies on the US at University of Havana, Castro Marino believes that the White House policy on the island is basically a 'philosophy of punishment' and that progress will only be possible when a generational change occurs both in Cuba and in Miami...

"Asked whether this is a proper time for a change in US-Cuban ties, Castro Mario answered 'There will not be any changes. The USG had decided not to boost any changes before Fidel Castro's surgery. Last month, Washington revealed a document in which it stated it would not accept a government led by Raul or Fidel, even if they were elected in American-style elections. The White House has said it does not want a succession but a transition. The Iraqi program prevails - a transition model that will require a series of measures such as calling several political parties to free elections.'

"Asked whether she believes that the US encourages a military

solution, Castro Marino answered that while the war in Iraq showed us that the US is willing to act unilaterally, the US situation in the Middle East is too complicated to start another military conflict along the lines of the Iraqi model not only in Cuba but in any other part of the world."

- "Washington funds the Venezuelan opposition"

Conservative "La Prensa" (08/27) reports "The USG is spending millions of dollars in the name of the Venezuelan democracy. It funds human rights seminars, trains emerging leaders, advises political parties and makes donations.

"President Hugo Chavez's supporters suspect that Washington... is disbursing thousands of dollars to help the Venezuelan opposition.

"... USG officials insist that the help is mainly legal and politically neutral cooperation, and that in the event those who receive donations were identified, the Chavez administration would chase them.

"However, the Venezuelan president believes that the US is making an open as well as a secret campaign to undermine his leftist government."

- "US, Asean sign expanded trade and investment pact"

Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald's" "World trade supplement" reports (08/28) "Southeast Asian trade ministers signed an expanded trade and investment agreement with the US on Friday that calls for a mechanism that allows US imports easier access to the region.

"The Trade and Investment Facilitation Arrangement, or TIFA, was signed by USTR Susan Schwab and trade and commerce ministers from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"It came a day after the bloc revived free trade talks with India, breaking months of deadlock."

- "The US could enter Mercosur through Uruguay"

Alcadio Oa, columnist of leading "Clarín," comments (08/26) "The big Mercosur partners (Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela) could find themselves in political and economic trouble if Uruguay makes progress on a trade deal with the US along the lines of the deal Washington reached with Peru. It would not be an FTA, but it would be very similar - similar enough to set off serious trouble within Mercosur.

"President Tabare Vazquez already said that he will ask for a waiver from his partners to speed up negotiations. And the idea of reaching a deal along the lines of Peru was a US idea.

"Such a deal would lower tariffs for the mutual entry of goods, preferences in governmental purchases, IPR protection, and access to

service and investment markets. Some provisions could benefit Uruguay, but all of them are in alignment with US policies. The US would not jeopardize its farm subsidies.

"... Those points that could bear fruit for Uruguay, would not make a major impact on the US economy. It seems remarkable that the US interest in the deal is not economic but political."

- "A foreign policy issue"

Daniel Santoro, political columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (08/26) "Yesterday, the FBI arrested an American citizen bringing explosive elements that had not been detected at Ezeiza airport (Buenos Aires).

"Airport security is no longer an international problem but a foreign policy issue. The US increasingly demands the implementation of more and more security measures at airports where US airplanes arrive and then rates them.

"The incident with Howard Mac Farlane Fish is not only due to a shortfall in agents from the Airport Security Police, who did not see the explosives in his luggage at Ezeiza airport, but also to lack of equipment and new technologies. To this, one should add the old and inefficient infrastructure of the section of Ezeiza airport where luggage is verified before boarding planes."

13. EDITORIALS

- "The use of nuclear threat"

Leading "Clarín" editorializes (08/28) "The proliferation of nuclear weapons is the main threat posed to international security..."

"Iran is one of the most sensitive cases because its government has given signals of its decision to continue enriching uranium as part of a rearmament policy. This implies dismissing claims from international organizations while maintaining its challenge to the US, which asked for the suspension of the nuclear plan..."

"Iran's nuclear development introduces another element of tension in Central Asia, the Persian Gulf and Middle East, and will impact oil prices, thereby disturbing the international economy. For its part, the USG did not contribute to improving the situation when it made progress on deals with India and Pakistan outside of the Non Proliferation Treaty. This implicitly acknowledges that the nuclear development of some countries is authorized while for others it is not."

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